



Virtual Town Hall

VA Connecticut Healthcare System
December 5, 2022



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VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs





VA Connecticut HCS Virtual Town Hall

Opening Remarks

Acting Director Russell Armstead

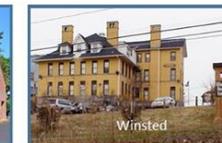
PACT Act & Toxic Exposure Screening

- Astrid Perez – Director, Hartford VA Regional Office
- Russell Armstead – Acting Director, VA Connecticut HCS

Questions and Answers

Wrap Up

Russell Armstead



**Please put your device on mute.
Use the chat to ask questions of the presenters.**



Announcements/Reminders

- Mandatory masking remains in place inside all buildings
- COVID-19 and flu vaccines available
 - Speak to your provider
 - Some walk-ins accepted weekdays 8am-3pm at both campuses
- Mobile check-in
 - Send text to **53079** and type **check in**
 - Will receive a link. Tap and start the check-in process
- West Haven Building 5 employee PIV card access only
- West Haven Lot 18 (Glade Street) lot closed 6pm-6am



**Please put your device on mute.
Use the chat to ask questions of the presenters.**



All Things PACT Act 101

PACT ACT Benefits Overview



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What is the PACT Act?



Vietnam



Gulf War Era



Post-9/11 Afghanistan and Iraq



The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022

is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. This law helps us provide generations of Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they've earned and deserve.

The PACT Act :

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.
- Expands eligibility for benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances.





PACT Act Key Components



The Act **expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures** and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.



VA **will improve the decision-making process** for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status.



Every enrolled Veteran **will receive an initial toxic exposure screening** and a follow-up screening every five years. Veterans who are not enrolled, but who are eligible to enroll, will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.



VA health care staff and claims processors will receive **toxic exposure-related education and training**.



The Act **requires research studies** on the mortality of Veterans who served in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War; Post-9/11 Veteran health trends; and Veteran cancer rates.



The Act will help VA **build a stronger, more skilled workforce** to meet the growing demand for benefits and services.



The Act **authorizes 31 new facilities** across the country, providing greater access to VA health care.





Gulf War Era and Post-9/11 Eligibility

If a Veteran served in any of these locations and time periods, they are eligible for the new Gulf War-related presumptions. This includes the airspace above any of these locations.



On or After August 2, 1990:

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE)



On or After September 11, 2001:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen





New Radiation Presumptive Locations



If you were called to respond to one of the listed cleanup and response missions below, you may be eligible for radiation exposure presumptives under the PACT Act.

Response Effort	Dates
Cleanup of Enewetak Atoll	January 1, 1977-December 31, 1980
Cleanup of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of Palomares, Spain	January 17, 1966-March 31, 1967
Response to the fire onboard an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near Thule Air Force Base in Greenland	January 21, 1968-September 25, 1968





Conditions Presumed to be Service-Connected

As of August 10, 2022, a long list of new conditions are presumed to be service-connected due to various in-service toxic exposures. **APPLY NOW** at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) to expedite your claim and benefits.

- Asthma (diagnosed after service)
- Brain cancer
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Glioblastoma
- Granulomatous disease
- Head cancer of any type
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphomatic cancer of any type
- Lymphoma of any type
- Melanoma
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)
- Neck cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type
- Sarcoidosis





Filing Claims to Receive Benefits

Veterans can file a claim for the new presumptive conditions:

- **New Claim**—Veteran has never filed for the presumptive condition
 - **Supplemental Claim**—the presumptive condition was previously denied but is now considered to be presumptive
-
- If VA denied one of the new presumptive conditions in the past but the Veteran may now be eligible for benefits, VA will try to contact them. There is no need to wait to file a Supplemental Claim.
 - VA is prioritizing the claims of Veterans with cancer to make sure they get timely access to the care and benefits they need.
 - **Pending Claims:** If a Veteran's condition was added to the list of [presumptive conditions](#)* after the claim was filed, VA will consider it on a presumptive basis.



*Presumptive conditions do not require proof that the military service caused the condition. Veterans only need to meet the service requirements and have a current diagnosis of the presumptive condition. Veterans should submit any supporting documentation to assist with their claim.





Other Affected Veterans and Survivors

What about additional benefits and care for other Veterans and their survivors?



Under the PACT Act, survivors may be eligible for VA benefits, including Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and Burial benefits.

- [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#)
- [Burial Benefits](#)



Get the care and benefits you EARNED and DESERVE!
Apply at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) today.





When or How Should I File a Claim?



APPLY NOW!

What if I have previously been denied?

Veterans previously denied a toxic-exposure related claim are encouraged to file a supplemental claim. Once a supplemental claim is received, VA will review the claim under the new law.

For more info, visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MyVA411





Hartford Regional Office Contact Information



Astrid A. Perez
Director

- **Regional Office (RO) - Bldg. 2E, 4th FL - Newington Campus:
RO in-person hours: 8:30am to 4:00pm Monday-Friday
Phone number (860) 666-7342**

Visitors seeking assistance from the Regional Office Public Contact Team are encouraged to schedule a virtual or in-person appointment on the Visitor Engagement Reporting Application (VERA). VERA appointments can be made by using the link or QR code below:

<https://vets.force.com/VAVERA/s/>





All Things PACT Act 101

PACT ACT Healthcare Overview



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Health Care Enrollment Eligibility

Veterans who served in the following locations and time periods can enroll in VA health care **NOW**:



- Republic of Vietnam (between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975)
- Thailand at any US or Royal Thai base (between January 9, 1962 and June 30, 1976)
- Laos (between December 1, 1965 and September 30, 1969)
- Certain Provinces in Cambodia (between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969)
- Guam or American Samoa or their territorial waters (between January 9, 1962 and July 31, 1980)
- Johnston Atoll, or a ship that called there (between January 1, 1972 and September 30, 1977)



Vietnam-era Veterans are now able to apply for two new Agent Orange presumptive conditions:

- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)

Special Enrollment Period – October 1, 2022 - October 1, 2023

for Post-9/11 combat Veterans who separated or discharged **between September 11, 2001 and October 1, 2013**. Enrollment is free, there are no annual costs, and care may be free as well!





Health Care Enrollment Eligibility



Since October 1, 2022, Post-9/11 Veterans who did not previously enroll in VA health care have a one-year window in which they may be eligible to enroll if they:

- Served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, **or**
- Served in a combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998, **and**
- Were discharged or released between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013



Section 103 of the law requires VA, in a phased approach, to provide hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness to veterans in three new categories





Health Care Enrollment Eligibility

- **Category 1** Veterans are those who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity, as defined by law, while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training;
- **Category 2** Veterans who were assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time;
 - On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates
 - On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA; and
- **Category 3** Veterans are those who were deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission.

Section 103 of the law requires VA, in a phased approach, to provide hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness to veterans in three new categories





Health Care Enrollment Eligibility

- Veterans identified in **Categories 1 or 2** will be eligible beginning:
 - October 1, 2024: Veterans who were discharged or released between August 2, 1990, and September 11, 2001
 - October 1, 2026: Veterans who were discharged or released between September 12, 2001, and December 31, 2006
 - October 1, 2028: Veterans who were discharged or released between January 1, 2007, and December 31, 2012
 - October 1, 2030: Veterans who were discharged or released between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2018
- **Veterans identified in Category 3 will be eligible beginning October 1, 2032.**

Veterans may be eligible for VA health care earlier if they have service-connected illnesses or conditions or if they meet existing eligibility criteria. VA may modify this schedule to an earlier date, if appropriate, based on the number of Veterans receiving care and services and resources available to VA. If a modification is made, VA will notify Congress and publish the modified date in the Federal Register.





Toxic Exposure Screening for Veterans

WHO: All Veterans enrolled in VA health care

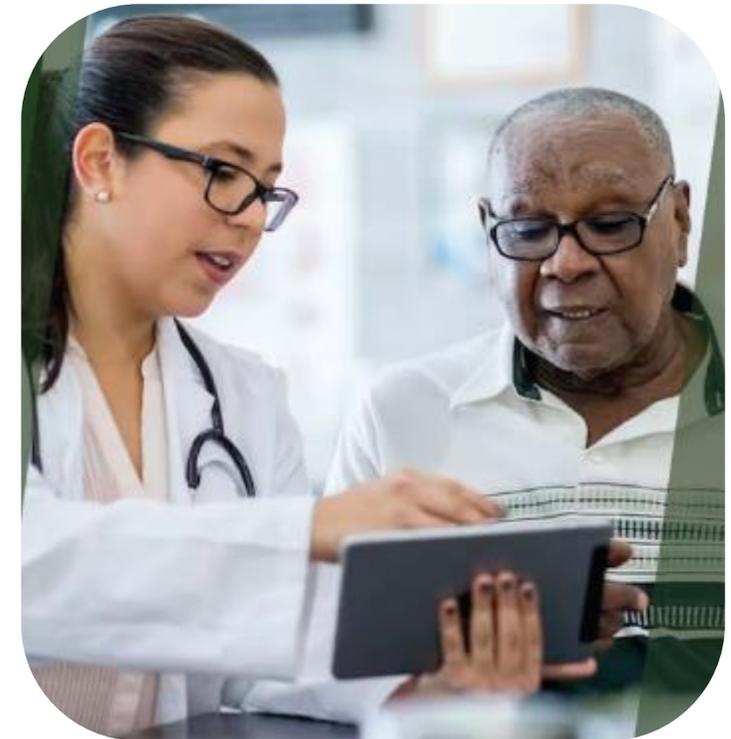
WHAT: A quick (5-10 minute) series of questions to identify and document any potential exposures to toxins during military service

WHEN: At least one every 5 years

WHERE: VA medical centers and clinics

WHY: Supports Veteran long-term health plans and informed, whole-health care

HOW: Veterans can ask about the screening at their next VA appointment





Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA) of 2022

- You may have seen advertisements from lawyers, law firms, or others seeking to represent Veterans and others in litigation related to the PACT Act or the CLJA. These lawyers, firms, and private parties are not connected with VA benefits or services.
- Seeking relief under the CLJA will not influence VA's decisions and will not affect the amount of the benefits or health care VA can provide.
- Relief awarded by the court in a lawsuit brought under the CLJA must be offset by the amount of any disability award, payment, or benefit VA provided to you or your legal representative due to exposure to water at Camp Lejeune.
- Learn more at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune/index.asp or call 1-800- MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411).
- For questions on the status of cases filed in federal court under the CLJA, contact the Department of Justice at camplejeune.pactact@usdoj.gov or call 202-353-4426.





Avoiding PACT Act Scams

There's been an increase in PACT Act-related [phishing \(email\)](#), vishing (phone), and [social media scams](#) targeting Veterans to access their PACT Act benefits or submit claims on their behalf. To report suspected scams, please contact the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline at [VA.gov/oig/hotline/](https://www.va.gov/oig/hotline/).



Do's

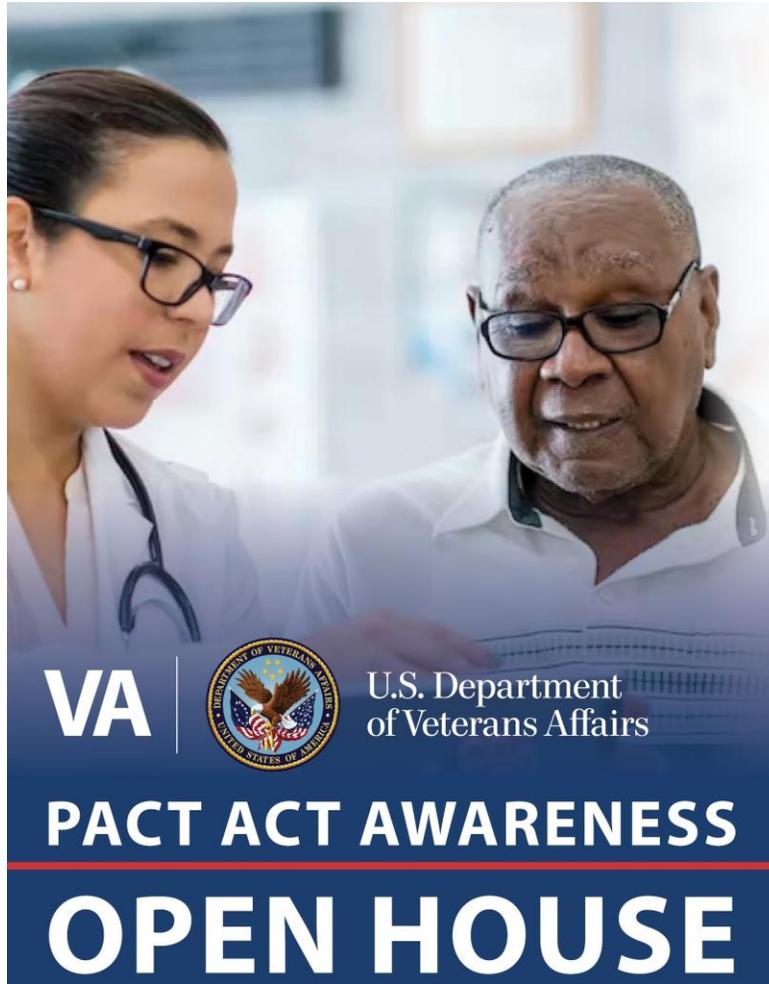
- Securely submit your application directly to VA online at benefits.va.gov/benefits/applying.asp or in person at any VA Regional Office. VA will assist in gathering supportive evidence at no cost to you.
- Be cautious of companies that (1) claim to be contacting you on behalf of VA, (2) advertise VA benefits can only be obtained with their help, or (3) attempt to pressure you into signing a contract.
- If you're interested in working with a Veterans Service Organization, agent, or attorney, use the VA Office of General Counsel (OGC) accreditation tool at [VA.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp](https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp) to confirm their credentials.

Don'ts

- Don't sign a contract agreeing to pay an unauthorized company a percentage of your benefit payment in exchange for assistance with your VA claim.
- Don't sign forms that are not VA generated or a blank form for someone else to complete later.
- Don't be fooled by companies that advertise special relationships with medical professionals and say they can guarantee your benefits award.
- Don't provide personal information (such as your social security number) to anyone offering claims assistance.



PACT Act Awareness Open House



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**PACT ACT AWARENESS
OPEN HOUSE**

Were you exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances?

Many services available, including:



Health care enrollment



Toxic exposure screenings



Claims support



Flu/COVID vaccines

Veterans, Veteran families, caregivers, survivors, and advocates are invited to attend.



The new PACT Act

- » Expands toxic-exposed Veterans access to VA care
- » Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- » Adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

EXPANDED VA CARE & BENEFITS

Learn more at VA.gov
1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)



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Saturday, Dec. 10 from 10am-noon
Newington Campus, Bldg. 2E main lobby
555 Willard Avenue



Contacting VA in Connecticut

Location	Phone Number
West Haven Campus	203-932-5711
Newington Campus	860-666-6951
Call Center – to make, cancel or reschedule an appointment	866-808-7921
Veterans Crisis Line	988
VA Benefits & Compensation	800-827-1000

<https://www.va.gov/> - National VA web site

<https://www.va.gov/connecticut-health-care/>

<https://www.facebook.com/VACConnecticut/>

- Regional Office (RO) - Bldg. 2E, 4th FL - Newington Campus, 555 Willard Avenue
RO in-person hours: 8:30am to 4:00pm Monday-Friday
Phone number (860) 666-7342

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Questions??